

**PATENT APPLICATION**  
**KITS AND METHODS FOR SUSPENDING TOYS OVER A PLAY AREA**

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## KITS AND METHODS FOR SUSPENDING TOYS OVER A PLAY AREA

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5           This invention relates generally to the field of baby products. More specifically, the invention relates to the display of items, such as toys, to a baby or a small child while being supported by a pillow.

          Infants and small children often need to be entertained, pacified or simply distracted. Fortunately, this may be done in such a manner so as to improve physical  
10          coordination, to help improve motor skills, or to facilitate educational development. One such way to entertain a small child is by lying the child down and permitting the child to play with one or more toys. However, if the child is unable to move around or hold a toy, it is difficult to keep the child entertained without adult supervision.

          To present toys to small children, various products have been marketed that  
15          suspend toys above the child. For example, Fischer-Price has a Sparkling Symphony™ Gym product where toys are suspended above the ground on a horizontal pole. However, when lying a child on a hard surface, the child can be uncomfortable. Further, the child may roll around or move along the floor such that the suspended toys become inaccessible to the child.

          Hence, this invention is related to the presentation of items, such as toys, to  
20          small children. This is done in a comfortable environment while also appropriately positioning the child to permit the child to easily access the toys.

### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

          The invention provides kits and techniques for presenting items, such as toys,  
25          to infants or small children. In one embodiment, such a kit includes a pillow having a pillow body and at least one attachment mechanism that is connected to the pillow. The kit also includes at least one bar that may be positioned over the pillow, with the attachment mechanism being used to attach the pillow to the bar. In this way, the bar may remain positioned over the pillow when in use. The bar also includes at least one coupling  
30          mechanism to permit one or more toys to be coupled to the bar. In this manner, the toys may be suspended over the pillow to permit a child to lie on the pillow and to reach up and play with the toys.

In one aspect, the pillow has a medial region and two opposing arms that define a generally open well. Such a configuration permits a baby to be placed within the well, with the baby's head resting on the medial region. In this way, the medial region provides a comfortable support for the baby's head as well as "propping up" the baby so that the baby may easily reach the suspended toys. Further, the two arms prevent the baby from rolling from side to side so that the toys will remain suspended over the baby.

The bar may include two or more ends that may be placed onto a surface onto which the pillow also rests to hold the bar over the pillow. The attachment mechanisms may be coupled to the bar at or just above the ends so that a middle section of the bar is free to suspend the toys. The bar may be fashioned into a variety of shapes. For example, the bar may be curved over the pillow. Further, multiple bars may be used to increase the number of toys that may be suspended. Merely by way of example, two bars may be used that each have a pair of ends. The four ends of the bars extend around the periphery of the pillow to help hold the pillow beneath the bars. For instance, two of the ends may be positioned near the free ends of the opposing arms while the other two ends are positioned near where the arms are joined to the medial region. However, it will be appreciated that other arrangements are possible particularly depending on the numbers of bars and/or ends of the bars.

A variety of attachment mechanisms may be used to attach the pillow to the bars. For example, a loop of fabric or other material that is coupled to the pillow body may be used. With such a configuration, the ends of the bars may simply be slid through the loops. Other attachment mechanisms include fabric or other strips having snaps, a hook and loop fastener material, such as Velcro, or the like. Alternatively, the strips may be tied together. In some cases, the attachment mechanism may be a pocket on the pillow into which the end of the bar is inserted.

In a similar manner, a variety of coupling mechanisms may be used to couple the toys to the bars. For example, the coupling mechanism may comprise a strip of fabric or other material hanging from the bar. The strip may include a snap or a hook and loop fastener material to permit the strip to be looped around the toy and fastened together.

Instead of providing a pillow with the kit, a pillow cover may alternatively be used. In this way, a user already having a pillow may simply place the cover over the pillow and then attach the pillow to the bar. Conveniently, the attachment mechanisms may be coupled to the cover so that the pillow may easily be attached to the bar once the cover is placed over the pillow. The pillow cover may optionally include a zipper or other fastener to

permit the cover to be opened when placing the cover about the pillow. Once in place, the zipper is closed to secure the cover about the pillow.

In use, a child may be placed onto the pillow so that the child is lying face up. The bar may be placed over the child and secured to the pillow. This may be done while the toys are attached to the bar, or afterward. Alternatively, the bar may be placed about the pillow, and the child inserted between the bar and the pillow. Once in place, the toys are suspended over the child's head and chest to permit the child to reach up and play with the toys. If desired, one or more of the toys may be removed and substituted with another toy.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a top view of an embodiment of a pillow according to the invention.

Fig. 2 is a front view of the pillow of Fig. 1.

Fig. 3 illustrates a kit having the pillow of Fig. 1 and a pair of bars that suspend a set of toys over the pillow according to the invention.

Fig. 4 is a side view of the kit of Fig. 3.

Fig. 5 illustrates a method for using the kit of Fig. 3.

Fig. 6 illustrates an alternative attachment mechanism for attaching a bar to a pillow according to the invention.

Fig. 7 illustrates an alternative kit for suspending toys over a pillow according to the invention.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

The invention provides structures and techniques for suspending objects, such as toys, over infants or small children. Conveniently, the toys may be positioned within the grasp of the child while the child is lying down, inclined or sitting upright. To suspend the objects, the invention utilizes a suspension system or other type of structure from which one or more objects may be suspended. The suspension system or structure may have at least one end or a base that is configured to rest on a surface or to be mounted to another type of structure. For example, the ends may be mounted to a pillow. As another example, the ends of the suspension system may all rest a support surface, or one or more ends may be suspended in air. One way to construct the suspension system is by the use of one or more bars or poles that extend into the air so that objects may be suspended from the bars. The bars may be joined together, may cross each other, or be formed as an integral unit. The bars may be constructed of any material having sufficient rigidity to remain suspended in air.

Merely by way of example, types of materials that may be used include metals, plastics, composites, wood, rubbers, and the like.

The bar structure may be configured to be positioned about a perimeter of a pillow or other resilient structure on which the child is to be placed. This arrangement permits the support structure to be appropriately positioned so that objects may be suspended over the pillow. Further, by surrounding the pillow, the support structure helps to prevent movement of the pillow relative to the suspended objects. Optionally, the bar structure may be coupled to the pillow to further prevent movement of the pillow relative to the bar structure.

The suspension system may be configured to suspend the objects at essentially any height relative to the child. For example, the objects may be immediately above the child's head or chest to permit the child to reach up and grasp the objects. Alternatively, the objects may be placed out of reach of the child.

A wide variety of pillows may be used to support and/or to restrain movement of the child. For example, one type of pillow that may be used includes a medial region and two opposing arms that define an open well. Such pillows are described in, for example, U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,546,620; 5,661,861; and 6,038,720. Other types of pillows that may be used to support the child are described in copending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed September 15, 2000 (Attorney Docket No. 17242-007100). The complete disclosures of all these references are herein incorporated by reference. Other types of pillows having other shapes and configurations that are known in the art may also be used. One advantage of a pillow having a medial region and two opposing arms is that the arms may be used to restrain the child to limit the child's movement. In this way, the objects may remain appropriately positioned over the child.

Conveniently, the suspension system and support pillows may be provided in kit form. In this way, a consumer may purchase a kit having both a pillow and a suspension system. Optionally, one or more objects that are to be suspended may also be provided with the kit. In one option, a kit may be provided having a suspension system and a cover. In this way, a consumer already having a pillow may simply place the cover over the pillow. The cover may have one or more attachment mechanisms to permit the pillow to be attached to the suspension system.

A variety of attachment mechanisms may be used to attach the pillows to the suspension systems. For example, one or more fabric strips, strings or loops may extend from the pillow. These may be placed, wrapped or tied around the bars of the suspension

system. Conveniently, snaps, buckles, a hook and loop fasteners material, or the like may also be used in attaching the pillow to the bars. In some cases, the pillow may include one or more pockets into which ends of the bars may be placed. The attachment mechanisms may be coupled to a cover of the pillow or integrally formed with the pillow body.

5 A wide variety of objects may be suspended over the child. For example, the objects may comprise toys that are education in design or that are configured to simply entertain or distract the child. For instance, such toys may include: balls, blocks, planes, space ships, vehicles, blocks, numbers, letters, animals, insects, figures and the like. Further, the objects may be constructed of various materials and maybe of different colors.

10 The objects may be coupled to the suspension system in a variety of ways. For example, coupling mechanisms such as fabric strips, strings, chains and the like may be used. The objects may have a hole, hook, or the like through which the coupling mechanism may be passed, looped or tied. Conveniently, snaps, buckles, hook and loop fastener materials, or the like may be used as coupling mechanisms. The length of the coupling mechanisms may be adjustable to vary the height at which the objects are suspended over the child. The coupling mechanism may even be elastic to permit the object to be grasped and pulled down to the child.

15 Referring now to Fig. 1, one embodiment of a support pillow 10 will be described. Pillow 10 is constructed of a pillow body 12 having a medial region 14 and two opposing arms 16 and 18 that define a generally open well 20. Pillow body 12 may be constructed in a manner similar to that described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,261,134; 5,546,620; 5,661,861 and 6,038,720, previously incorporated by reference. Pillow 10 conveniently includes a fabric cover 22. As best shown in Fig. 2, cover 22 includes a zipper 24 to permit cover 22 to be opened and closed. In this way, cover 22 may be placed over and removed from pillow body 12.

20 Sewn to seams of cover 22 are a set of fabric loops 26 that serve as attachment mechanisms for a suspension system 28 as shown in Figs. 3 and 4. In this way, pillow 10 may be secured to suspension system 28 to prevent relative movement between suspension system 28 and pillow 10. Configuration of cover 22 is advantageous in that suspension system 28 and cover 22 may be sold as a kit so that consumers already having a support pillow need only purchase a cover rather than another pillow. Alternatively, pillow 10 may be constructed to have a non-removable cover having attachment mechanisms. In this way, a kit may be provided both with a suspension system and with a pillow.

Suspension system 28 comprises a pair of curved bars 30 and 32 having ends 34 that rest on a surface 36 along with pillow 10. Ends 34 may be shaped or oversized to help stabilize bars 30 and 32. Bars 30 and 32 are joined together at an apex 38 and are shaped such that loops 26 extend around bars 30 and 32 as shown. Bars 30 and 32 may be placed over pillow 10 and the ends inserted through loops 26. Alternatively, other attachments may be used that are looped or tied around the bars after the bars are in place. Bars 30 and 32 are positioned about pillow 10 so as to provide a large enough opening to place the child onto the pillow and to provide a generally open environment. Hanging from bars 30 and 32 are fabric strips 40. Conveniently, bars 30 and 32 may include holes through which strips 40 are fastened. Coupled to strips 40 are a set of toys 42, including a ball, a ring and a block. However, it will be appreciated that a variety of other objects may be suspended as previously described. Conveniently, strips 40 may include snaps to permit strips 40 to be wrapped around toys 42 and then snapped together. However, a variety of other coupling devices may be used as previously described. Although shown with four toys, it will be appreciated that any number of toys may be suspended. Further, these may be suspended at any height and at any location on bars 30 and 32.

In use, a child may be placed onto pillow 10 as shown in Fig. 5. The child's head is positioned on top of medial region 14 while the torso is received within the open well. In this way, arms 16 and 18 prevent the child from rolling from side to side. At the same time, medial region 14 props the child's head to permit the child to easily see and grasp the toys. If desired, additional padding may be placed under the baby as described in the previously incorporated patent documents. In some cases, the child may be placed in a sitting position within the well, with the toys hanging in front of the child. Other orientations of the child and toys are also possible.

Instead of resting the suspension system directly onto a surface, the ends of the bars may be held by the pillow itself. An example of such a configuration is shown in Fig. 6 where a flexible pole 46 is held within a pocket 48 if a cover 50. A similar pocket maybe provided on an opposite side of cover 50, and pole 46 may be flexed and inserted into the pockets. The tension in pole 46 holds the pole in place within the pockets.

The suspension systems of the invention may include other number of bars and/or feet. One example of such a configuration is shown in Fig. 7. In Fig. 7, pillow 10 has been modified to include three loops 26. Used with pillow 10 is a suspension system 50 having three bars 50, 52 and 54 and three ends. One end is adjacent medial region 14 while

the other ends are adjacent arms 16 and 18. In this way, an access way is provided to place the child onto pillow 10.

The invention has now been described in detail for purposes of clarity and understanding. However, it will be appreciated that certain changes and modifications may be practiced within the scope of the appended claims. For example, it will be appreciated that other variations of the suspension system are possible. For instance, only a single bar could be used. Further, one end of the bar may be suspended above the pillow.

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